



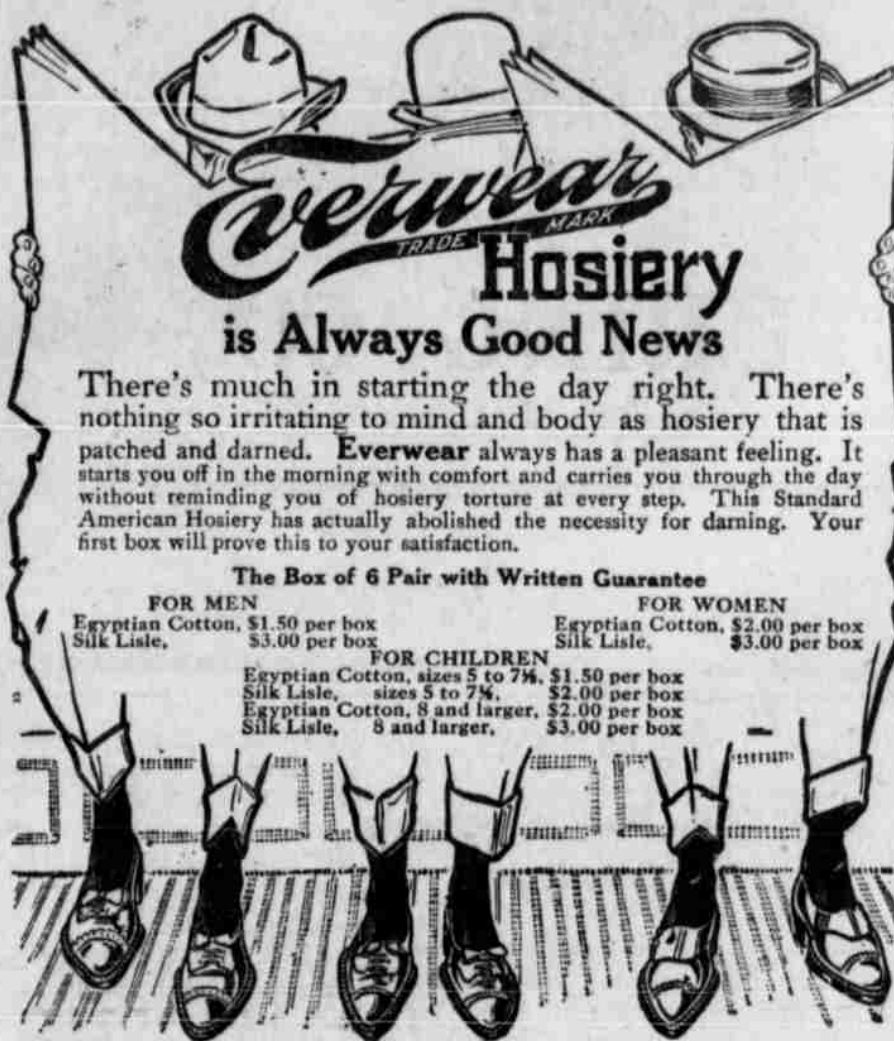
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By CARL JENKINS

"You know I never shot a gun in my life."

"But you are such a booby for a girl of twenty."

"Well, show me again."

"You draw the gun up to your face—so. You shut your left eye—so. You keep the other open and squint along the barrel. Then you put your forefinger around the trigger and pull. It's just as easy as an old shoe."

"But it will be loaded."

"With powder and dried peas. You don't want to kill the robins, but just to scare them off. They'll strip the cherry trees if we don't do something."

It was Burt Traynor and his sister Madge. To the right of the house and nearer the highway were four big cherry trees, and their burdens of ripe, red fruit were ready for picking. It seemed that every robin for ten miles around knew it, and was there to claim his share in advance. Fred was to be absent that afternoon, while the mother was already away. The cook had tried waving her apron and calling out, "Shoo!" but the birds had not been dismayed. The gun was loaded and left at the back door, and Fred left a last caution as he departed:

"You remember what I told you. Fire to the top of a tree. It will be the report that will frighten them away. Don't drop the gun and fall over it when you fire."

Half an hour later the cook was sent out to see if the robins had gathered after their last scare. She came back to report:

"They are back by the hundreds, miss, and there's something besides. On my soul, I believe I saw a tramp pulling himself up into one of the trees!"

"I don't believe a tramp would stop for cherries," was the doubting reply of the girl.

"Aye, but they would. They just dotes on 'em. After they have filled their stomachs they fill their pockets, and there's half a bushel of the reddest, ripest cherries in the country gone. You'll have to fire that gun, Miss Traynor, even if it blows up and kills us both."

Miss Madge walked out with pale face and trembling limbs, but she was somewhat relieved when a close scrutiny of the trees failed to disclose a tramp. The cook must have seen the family cat prowling about. The gun must be fired, however. A lusty robin wants a score of cherries for a meal.

"You first lift it up," said the cook. "Now, then, take aim, as they call it."

"At what?"

"At the sky or anything else except me. That's right. Let it wobble all over. The more it wobbles the more the birds will be frightened. Now your finger on the trigger."

"And now what?"

"Shut your eyes, and pull."

The directions were obeyed, and half a hundred robins took to sudden flight, calling out as they went. Thirty seconds later, there came a human yell, and a man dropped from one of the trees to the grass.

"Oh, heavens, but I've shot a man!" cried Miss Madge as she tossed the gun away and began to wring her hands.

"Only a tramp, darlint—only a tramp, and they don't count. They are here to be shot whenever one feels like it. He's a-kicking around so lively that he can't be dead. Sit down on the steps and I'll take the ax and advance upon the enemy. If he surrenders, all right; if he don't then—"

A minute later her voice was heard calling and her hand was seen beckoning, and as the perturbed girl slowly advanced a young man struggled into a sitting position, and forcing a rather silly smile to his face he said:

"I beg pardon for putting you to this trouble."

"Oh, it's no trouble at all to shoot a tramp," answered the cook as she stood the ax up against the tree.

"But I'm not—not exactly a tramp," replied the trespasser, looking at the girl as he said so.

"But you are bleeding—and are wounded!"

"Yes, I think a few of the dried peas hit me in the shoulder, but I am more scared than hurt. If—if I could get my coat off and the hurt bound up—"

And then he fainted dead away. The cook ran for water and the girl stood wringing her hands and weeping. Then a passing traveler who saw that something was wrong left his vehicle to investigate, and it was he who helped the cook to get the wounded man into the house and into bed and telephoned for the doctor.

"Um! Who shot him?" asked the doctor when he had arrived and laid the shoulder bare.

"I—I did!" was the sobbing reply.

"Buckshot?"

"No—dried peas."

"Well, he won't die, but you'll have him on your hands for some time to come. What did you take him for?"

"The cook said he was a tramp, but I didn't mean to hit him, I just aimed anywhere."

"That's right. Always aim any old where and you are bound to bring down something. He'll have his eyes open in ten minutes and want to talk. There's a bike out in front, and it must belong to him. He's no tramp."

As soon as the shock passed off the young man laughed at his weakness and wanted to dress and go his way, but the cook sternly forbade.

"What kind of a family do you take us for?" she demanded, with a sniff and a snort. "Do you think we take a gentleman for a tramp and shoot him out of a tree with dried peas and then send him along to die on the road? You'll lie right there



and have the best in the house for many a day."

It was when Fred finally appeared that Miss Madge ran to him with the exclamation:

"Oh, Fred, you hadn't been gone an hour when I shot a man!"

"The devil you did! Where's the corpse?"

"Up stairs. It isn't a corpse yet. Cook says it can talk."

Fred went up to the room of the wounded man and was gone an hour. When he came down he said to his sister:

"You are a nice sort of sister to have! Nice young man with a rich father sets out to see the country on his bike. Gets tired and stops to rest, and thinks he'll pick a few cherries. You don't even yell at him, but up with an old shotgun and bring him down. His name is Royal Grahame, and if you find yourself behind the bars—"

"And don't cry, darlint!" soothed the cook ten minutes later. "I've read of one hundred cases just like this, and they all ended the same way. It's the way Cupid has, you know."

"What way?"

"Why to bring two beating hearts together for life. He'll be out on the veranda in a week, and then—and then—"

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